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Director of
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FRANCE-USSR: Mitterrand Reconsidering Summit

Policy differences with the US may be prompting President Mitterrand to reconsider his refusal to meet with high-level Soviet officials, but he will proceed cautiously.

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Comment: Mitterrand may be reconsidering his earlier refusal to meet with Brezhnev because of concern that what he views as an excessively anti-Soviet policy by the US may provoke aggressive elements in Moscow. Current vexation with the US over bilateral economic and Third World policies may also be reinforcing the usual French desire to demonstrate independence on East-West matters.

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Mitterrand's basic assessment that the USSR is expansionist and presents a military threat does not, however, appear to have changed. He has taken a harder line with Moscow than his predecessors, criticizing former President Giscard's meeting with Brezhnev in Warsaw after the invasion of Afghanistan and condemning the Soviet military buildup and intervention in Poland.

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The French leader probably would not want to be viewed as reacting to guidance from his Communist governing partners or to Giscard's recent criticism of his cool relations with the USSR. Although the President would be willing to exchange views, he would make clear his differences with Moscow.

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The Soviets would welcome a French initiative to hold a summit. With the West Europeans and the US at odds over the pipeline, Moscow would be eager to portray a summit as a sign of converging Soviet and French views on East-West trade. Brezhnev's health, however, probably would preclude his traveling to France.

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